Humor

How much is an off-spot five spot worth?

By Roger Boye 900

Today's column answers questions about the world of misstruck coins and oddly printed currency, where "to err is divine."

Q—In January you described a $1 bill with upside-down serial numbers that's worth $150. The numbers on my $5 bill are right-side up, but they are so far to the left that two digits of the top number sit on Abe's hair. Does my "five spot" have special value?

J.N., Elgin

A—It might retail for as much as $30 if it's in uncirculated condition. Bills with serial-number shifts—either left or right, or up or down—have little value to collectors unless some of the number overlaps with another part of the front-side design.

Q—Are wheat cents of the "BIE" variety worth anything? I have a 1950-D, 1955-D and 1957-D with the error.

L.N., Elmwood Park

A—Your wheaties probably would sell for up to $1 each. On a "BIE" penny, the word "LIB-ERTY" appears to be spelled "LIBIERTY" because of a small break on the die that made the coin. Similar varieties include "LIIBERTY" and "LIBERITY."

Q—Are there valuable error coins I might find in circulation?

B.F., Chicago

A—A 1972 "doubled die" Lincoln cent—with a doubling of the front-side lettering—retails for as much as $250 in uncirculated condition while a 1983 Lincoln cent with a "doubled die" tails side goes for about $150. Both coins were created with poorly made dies.

Dimes of 1982 missing a mint mark sometimes bring $150 or more. The government forgot to add a "P" (for Philadelphia) to just one of the thousands of dies used to make dimes that year. But your chances of finding any of these oddities probably are less than winning the Illinois Lottery.

Q—A green blob the size of a thumb print covers the upper left corner of my "brand new" series 1988-A $1 bill. Is it special?

T.R., Chicago

A—Collectors covet bills with ink smears or blobs caused by glitches in the printing process. The item you describe might retail for at least $5, depending on the size of the impacted area.